

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 19, 2010

Chairman George Miller
Committee on Education and Labor
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member John Kline
Committee on Education and Labor
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Miller and Ranking Member Kline:

As Members representing rural districts, we would like to offer our comments on the upcoming reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) and the issues facing rural education. Your attention to these concerns is greatly appreciated.

SUPPORT THE RURAL EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

We would like to express our strong support for the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP), an important tool that provides funding to rural districts for a wide variety of purposes including hiring new teachers, providing professional development opportunities, and bringing new technology to the classroom.

REAP is specifically designed to help level the playing field for small and high-poverty rural school systems. In many of these districts, federal formula programs do not produce enough resources to carry out the purposes of the grant. In addition, small and rural school districts are often forced to forgo federal education dollars because they lack the personnel and the resources to apply for competitive grants. REAP enables school districts to undertake significant reform by allowing them to combine their funding and by providing them with necessary additional funds.

We are deeply concerned that the Administration's Fiscal Year 2011 budget proposal would allow the Secretary of Education to set aside an unspecified amount of REAP dollars to fund competitive grant initiatives. We strongly encourage the Committee to reject redesigning any component of REAP to provide for competitive grants. In addition, we strongly oppose any changes that allow the Secretary to set aside funding for national rural activities because the program is already facing more demand than it can meet. We, however, support changes to REAP which would allow federal funds to be even more closely targeted to rural, in-need districts.

PRESERVE FORMULA FUNDING

We are concerned by the Administration's proposal to shift all or portions of program funding, including Title I allocations and REAP funding, to competitive grants and the impact this will have on rural education.

To begin funding these federal programs through competitive grants will lead to greater inequality of federal aid. The districts with more administrative resources are the ones who will be able to apply for competitive grants and the districts without the administrative capacity will be left behind. We ask that you maintain formula funding to ensure rural schools have equal access to much needed federal funding.

concerned that limiting turnaround models to four – three of which lack a strong basis in research – unfairly hampers the efforts of rural communities to invest in turnaround.

As mentioned earlier, rural schools lack the capacities of their urban and suburban counterparts and are often at a distinct disadvantage in recruiting and retaining highly qualified and effective personnel. For these reasons, we ask that additional research-based turnaround models be permitted that would allow rural communities the flexibility they need to address school improvement adequately.

In closing, the policies of the last ESEA did not sufficiently account for the vast differences in school districts throughout the country, making it incredibly difficult for smaller school configurations with limited resources to meet the demands required under the law, particularly as they relate to highly qualified teachers and Supplemental Education Services (SES). During this reauthorization, we encourage you to look at those areas of the law that have failed our rural schools and communities, and ask that you promote policies to support rural schools and enable them to overcome the unique challenges they face.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to working with you on this critical reauthorization.

Sincerely,

		
		
		
		
		
		

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